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EPA evaluating cleanup steps for waste site

By HAROLD SCARLETT
Post Environment Writer

A full cleanup of a hazardous waste site near the Astrodome — blamed for the contamination of three shallow water wells — will probably not get under way before mid-1987, state officials told a public meeting Wednesday night.

But the Environmental Protection Agency is now evaluating the need for any immediate steps and will probably fence off the contaminated area within the next three weeks to protect unwary citizens, the officials said.

3 commercial lots

The one-acre Sol Lynn site comprises three commercial lots at 1415, 1417, and 1419 South Loop West, within a half mile of the Astrodome, the AstroWorld amusement park, several industrial businesses and apartment complexes.

Officials of the Texas Department of Water Resources conducted the public meeting, held at the Astro Village Hotel, to explain cleanup plans to area residents and businessmen.

The waste site in the 1970s was occupied by a transformer reclamation company that left PCB contamination, and later by a chemical supply company that spilled trichloroethylene (TCE), officials said.

The officials said the toxic contaminants apparently were

either spilled or poured out on the ground to get rid of them.

They said the site, now occupied by other businesses, was nominated to the national superfund list for priority cleanup last October after the owner, Sol Lynn, said in a deposition he was financially unable to clean up the site.

Lew Turnock, a City Health Department environmental engineer who first reported the site to the TDWR, said tests have shown TCE contamination of shallow drinking-water wells on the Lynn site, a nearby equipment company and at a Bell Telephone facility.

The TDWR officials said state and city sampling has shown up to 1,710 parts per million of TCE in the shallow groundwater, up to 953 ppm TCE in the soil and up to 90 ppm of PCBs in the soil.

Dr. Richard A. Beauchamp, a Texas Department of Health epidemiologist, said both contaminants have caused cancers in test animals.

Less exposure

Beauchamp, however, said breathing the air around the site now would involve less exposure to TCE than surgical patients once received.

Timothy J. Wolterink, a superfund project manager for TDWR, said the state agency is requesting a \$350,000 grant from the EPA to develop a cleanup plan.

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Fall study of toxic cleanup planned

By BILL DAWSON
Houston Chronicle

A state contractor this fall will probably begin a \$350,000 study of a toxic waste site near the Astrodome to plan a cleanup tentatively scheduled for 1987.

Timothy Wolterink of the Texas Department of Water Resources told a public hearing Wednesday night there is no estimate now of the cost to clean up toxic TCE and PCBs, suspected cancer-causing chemicals, at the Sol Lynn site at 1415, 1417 and 1419 South Loop West.

TCE — trichloroethylene — is a common degreaser and solvent. PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — were once widely used in electrical transformers and capacitors, but are now banned.

The Environmental Protection Agency will probably fence the site within a few weeks, he said. Employees of three businesses there — which have no connection to the contamination — would still have access.

The site, also known as Industrial Transformers after a business formerly operated there, was added last fall to the federal superfund list of the nation's worst hazardous waste sites.

Officials told about 25 people at the hearing that the site is not an immediate threat to public health and is not as bad as several other superfund sites in Texas.

Wolterink said his department nominated the site for the cleanup priority list mainly because officials feared TCE found in a shallow well there might some day contaminate nearby deeper wells that provide part of Houston's public drinking water supply.

Lew Turnock of the Houston Health Department said TCE also was discovered in another shallow well on the Lynn property and in a third one just off the site. None is now used, he said.

B.W. Hughey of Discount Glass & Mirror Co., one of the businesses now at the site, said employees do not use city water because of concern that it flows through the same pipes that once carried water from a polluted well.

Turnock said, however, any TCE in the pipes would have been flushed out in a short time.

Dr. Richard Beauchamp of the Texas Department of Health said the amount of TCE people might breathe at the site are "far lower" than those once used to anesthetize patients. Medical use was halted because of animal tests suggesting TCE may cause cancer, he said.

Levels of PCBs found in the soil at the site were much lower than the levels of TCE in the shallow groundwater, officials said.

Turnock and David Buchanan of Water Resources said inspections indicated someone had punctured drums of TCE and let the chemical drain into the ground several years ago. Officials believe the PCBs came from the recycling of old transformers, Buchanan said.

He said Lynn told state officials he could not pay to clean up the property, which he still owns. The case was then referred for action under the superfund program, which finances cleanups in such cases.

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